

Introduction to Backcountry Hiking

Whether a day or overnight trip, hiking into Grand Canyon via the Bright Angel, North Kaibab, or South Kaibab trails gives an unparalleled experience that changes your perspective.

Knowledge, preparation, and a good plan are all keys to success. Be honest about your health and fitness, know your limits, and avoid spontaneity—Grand Canyon is an extreme environment!

Stay together, follow your plan, and know where and how to seek help (call 911). *Turning around may be the best decision.*

For more information about Leave No Trace strategies, hiking tips, closures, roads, trails, and permits, visit go.nps.gov/grca-backcountry.

Before You Go

- Each trail offers a unique opportunity to experience Grand Canyon. Choose the appropriate trail for your abilities. Consider walking the Rim Trail for an easier experience.
- Check the weather forecast and adjust plans, especially to avoid summer heat. Remember the weather can change suddenly.
- Leave your itinerary with family or friends who will notice if you are overdue and can call 911 to report it.
- Hydrate, eat a good meal, and get a good night’s sleep. If you do not feel well, do not go for a hike.
- Prepare yourself for a faster hike down with high impact on your joints and a slow, strenuous hike out that may take twice as long or longer.

While Hiking

Balance Food and Water Intake

- Eat and drink while resting—sip fluids while hiking. Do not wait until you feel thirsty to drink.

Restore Your Energy

- Eat double your normal intake of carbohydrates and salty foods. Calories play an important role in regulating body temperature and hiking suppresses your appetite.

Take Care of Your Body

- If you start to feel nauseated, dizzy, or disoriented, rest, eat, and drink until you feel better. This can take an hour or longer.
- If you are hot, cool off by getting wet in creeks and water stations. If you are cold, put on more layers and eat more food.
- Take plenty of breaks and enjoy the view while resting.

10 Essentials for Your Day Pack

1. Water

Pack at least two liters of water depending on hike intensity and duration. Always bring a water treatment method in case of pipeline breaks or repair work.

2. Food

Salty snacks and high-calorie meal(s).

3. First Aid Kit

Include prescription medications, blister care, duct tape, and pocket knife.

4. Map or Trail Guide

Know your route, including trail quality and water resources.

5. Flashlight or Headlamp

Include spare batteries; you may end up hiking in the dark unexpectedly. Cell phones may not provide adequate light and will run out of battery power.

6. Sun Protection

Sunscreen, wide-brimmed hat, and sunglasses.

7. Communication

Yelling, a whistle, signal mirrors, and cell phones—while service is limited, phones can be helpful.

8. Emergency Shelter

A lightweight tarp provides shade and shelter.

9. Correct Gear

Layer clothing to protect yourself from the weather. Wear broken-in hiking shoes with good soles. Bring hiking poles to lessen the impact on your joints.

10. Know How to Rescue Yourself

YOU are responsible for your safety and the safety of your family and friends. Rescue is not guaranteed, and assistance may take hours or days due to weather or other emergencies.

Warning!

Hiking to the river and back in one day is not recommended due to long distance, extreme temperature changes, and an approximately 5,000-foot (1,500 m) elevation change each way.

If you think you have the fitness and expertise to attempt this extremely strenuous hike, please seek the advice of a park ranger at the Backcountry Information Center.



What to Expect Each Season



Winter

Plan for short days and long, cold nights with potential snow and ice at the top and rain in the canyon. The upper portion of all trails can be icy and dangerous. The South Kaibab Trail receives more sun than the Bright Angel Trail.

Average temperatures at the top: 19°F to 45°F (-7°C to 7°C)
Average temperatures at the river: 38°F to 59°F (3°C to 15°C)

Hiking Tips

- Carry over-the-shoe traction devices and know how to use them to assist you on icy trials.
- Wear a warm hat, gloves, wool socks, and synthetic or wool-blend layers to wick moisture away from your skin and keep you warm. Pack waterproof layers and dry clothes and socks in case you get wet.
- Eat warm foods often, such as soup, tea, cocoa, and oatmeal. Your body needs fuel to keep warm.
- Know the signs of hypothermia. Watch for uncontrolled shivering, confusion, and exhaustion. Put on dry clothing, drink warm liquids, and protect yourself from wind, rain, snow, and cold.



Spring and Autumn

Plan for short days with highly variable weather. While weather is typically cool, it can snow or be intensely hot. High winds are common.

Average temperatures at the top: 32°F to 63°F (0°C to 17°C)
Average temperatures at the river: 56°F to 82°F (13°C to 28°C)

Hiking Tips

- If the weather is hot, following summer hiking tips at right.
- Prepare for lingering ice in the spring and early snow in autumn. Wear over-the-shoe traction devices if necessary.
- Check water availability along the Bright Angel and North Kaibab trails. Seasonal water is usually available May to September.
- Wear windproof layers on windy days—wind chill can make a cool day bitterly cold.
- Stay aware—hypothermia can occur in 50°F (10°C) weather and heat illness in 80°F (27°C) weather.



Summer

Plan for hot and mostly dry weather in May and September; extremely hot and dry weather in June; and hot with monsoon thunderstorms in July and August.

Average temperatures at the top: 48°F to 83°F (9°C to 28°C)
Average temperatures at the river: 74°F to 104°F (23°C to 40°C); **temperatures can feel like 140°F (60°C) in the sun and reach 115°F (46°F) in the shade.**

Hiking Tips

- Start hiking before dawn, in the evening, or at night to avoid dangerous heat. Do not hike between 10 am and 4 pm.
- Wear light-colored, loose-fitting cotton clothing. Hike wet to stay cool. Soak your shirt, bandana, and hat at every opportunity.
- Beware of lightning, rockfall, and flash floods during storms. Stay away from edges, promontories, and individual trees.
- Know the signs of heat illness. Watch for headaches, dizziness, nausea and vomiting, cramping, and decreased urine output. Rest in the shade, get wet, hydrate, and eat high-energy foods.
- Know the signs of hyponatremia. Watch for nausea and vomiting, headache, difficulty walking, confusion, and seizures. Balance hydration with salty snacks, eat well-rounded meals, and rest frequently.

Hiking and Camping Destinations



The South Kaibab Trail follows an exposed ridge line with no shade on a well-maintained trail; best views during a short hike.

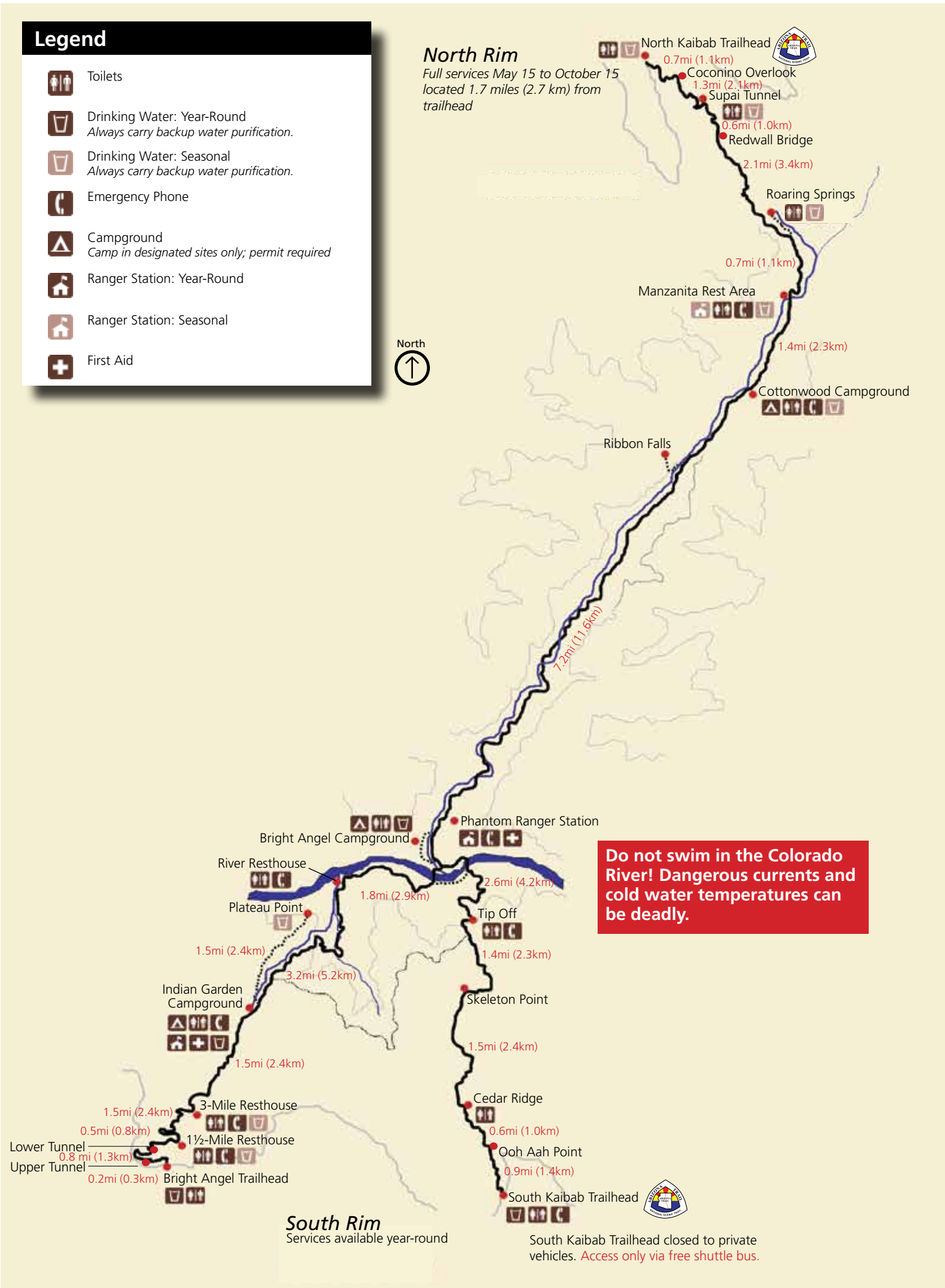


The Bright Angel Trail follows Bright Angel Fault down Garden Creek Canyon on a well-maintained trail; “easiest” trail, but still incredibly steep.



Trail Courtesy

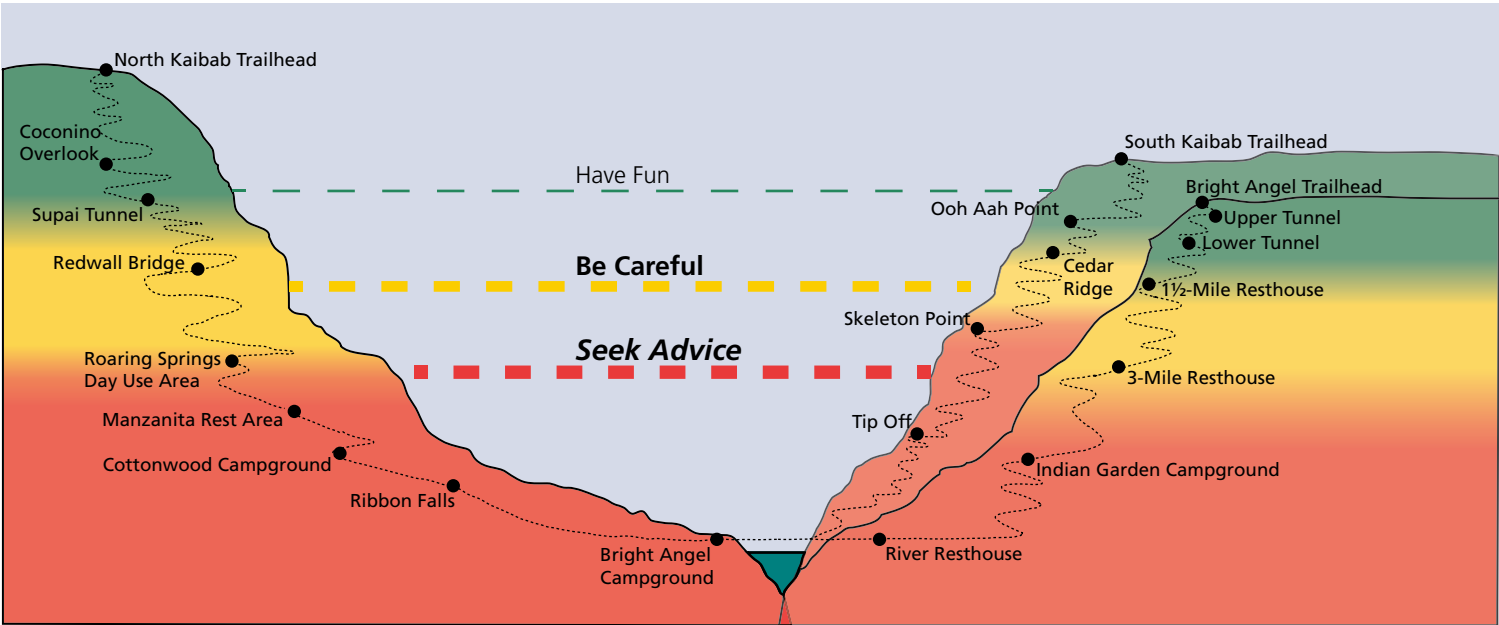
1. Travel with a friend and stick together.
2. Use toilets along the trails.
3. Mules have the right of way.
4. Uphill hikers have the right of way.
5. To pass someone in front of you: slow down and let them know you want to pass.
6. Do not store or abandon gear along the trail; it attracts wildlife.
7. Pack out your trash.
8. Be quiet and respect those who seek serenity.



The North Kaibab Trail travels through pine forests and rock outcroppings down Roaring Springs Canyon on a well-maintained trail.

North Kaibab Trailhead: elevation 8240ft (2511m)			
Destination	Elevation Change from Top	Distance Roundtrip	Time Roundtrip
Coconino Overlook	790ft (240m)	1.4mi (2.2km)	1–2 hours
Supai Tunnel	1400ft (425m)	4.0mi (6.4km)	2–4 hours
Redwall Bridge	2200ft (670m)	5.2mi (8.4km)	4–6 hours
Roaring Springs Day Use Area	3280ft (1000m)	9.4mi (15.1km)	6–9 hours
Manzanita Rest Area	3840ft (1170m)	10.8mi (17.4km)	7–10 hours
Cottonwood Campground	4200ft (1280m)	13.6mi (21.9km)	2 days
Ribbon Falls	4480ft (1365m)	16.6mi (26.7km)	1–2 hours from Cottonwood CG
Bright Angel Campground	5740ft (1750m)	28.0mi (45.1km)	4 days

South Kaibab Trailhead: elevation 7200ft (2195m)			
Destination	Elevation Change from Top	Distance Roundtrip	Time Roundtrip
Ooh Aah Point	760ft (230m)	1.8mi (2.8km)	1–2 hours
Cedar Ridge	1120ft (340m)	3mi (4.8km)	2–4 hours
Skeleton Point	2040ft (620m)	6mi (9.4km)	4–6 hours
Tip Off	3280ft (1000m)	8.8mi (14.2km)	6–9 hours
Bright Angel Campground	4700ft (1430m)	14mi (22.5km)	2 Days



Bright Angel Trailhead: elevation 6840ft (2085m)			
Destination	Elevation Change from Top	Distance Roundtrip	Time Roundtrip
Upper Tunnel	60ft (20m)	0.4mi (0.6km)	20 minutes
Lower Tunnel	590ft (180m)	1.7mi (2.8km)	1–2 hours
1 1/2-Mile Resthouse	1120ft (340m)	3mi (4.8km)	2–4 hours
3-Mile Resthouse	2120ft (645m)	6mi (9.6km)	4–6 hours
Indian Garden Campground	3040ft (925m)	9mi (14.4km)	6–9 hours
River Resthouse	4340ft (1320m)	15.4mi (24.8km)	12+ hours
Bright Angel Campground	4340ft (1320m)	19mi (30.6km)	2 Days

Overnight Camping on the Bright Angel, North Kaibab, and South Kaibab Trails

Plan Ahead and Prepare

- Backpackers planning to camp overnight must obtain a backcountry permit before starting their hike. Attach the permit visibly to your backpack. Camp only in campgrounds, not along the trail. No campfires allowed.
- In addition to the 10 items listed on the front of this map, overnight hikers should bring a stove, fuel, and matches; blanket or sleeping bag with ground pad; and ground cloth, tarp, or tent.
- Pack weight should not be more than 15–20% of your body weight. In summer, pack light—replace your sleeping bag with a liner or sheet; bring ready-to-eat foods and leave the stove behind.
- Watch and review the Hiking Grand Canyon, Prepare for Backpacking video, available at [go.nps.gov/grca-backcountry-video](https://www.nps.gov/grca-backcountry-video) and upon request.

While at Camp

- Choose your campsite. Sites are first-come, first-served with the required permit. Group sites are reserved for parties of seven to 11 hikers.
- Immediately place all food, toiletries, and plastic bags in the food storage cans at each campsite. Keep the lids closed and fastened shut at all times. Hang your backpack with the zippers open.
- Attach your backcountry permit to your tent, picnic table, or backpack. Leave your permit at your site during your entire stay at the campground.

When Leaving Camp

- If you are getting an early start, remember to maintain a quiet camp and let fellow campers continue to sleep.
- Clean up your site. Do not leave any trash, gear, or extra food. Check your site for microtrash—look for bandages, twist ties, fruit peels, etc.
- Remove everything from the food storage cans and place them upside down on the picnic table. This prevents animals from getting trapped inside.
- Attach your permit to your backpack for your hike out.
- Check the campground bulletin boards for weather, trail, and water updates.